



General Information About CAM and the NCCAM

This fact sheet provides general information about complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) and the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM). It is designed to give you a quick overview of NCCAM efforts to advance CAM research. When possible, this fact sheet includes the names and telephone numbers of resources that can give you more information.

What Is CAM?

CAM covers a broad range of healing philosophies (schools of thought), approaches, and therapies that mainstream Western (conventional) medicine does not commonly use, accept, study, understand, or make available. A few of the many CAM practices include the use of acupuncture, herbs, homeopathy, therapeutic massage, and traditional oriental medicine to promote well-being or treat health conditions.

People use CAM treatments and therapies in a variety of ways. Therapies may be used alone, as an alternative to conventional therapies, or in addition to conventional, mainstream therapies, in what is referred to as a complementary or an integrative approach.

Many CAM therapies are called holistic, which generally means they consider the whole person, including physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects.

CAM's Growing Popularity in the United States

A published survey shows that the number of Americans using an alternative therapy rose from about 33 percent in 1990 to more than 42 percent in 1997.¹ People in this study reported using the following therapies most often: herbal medicine, massage, megavitamins, self-help groups, folk remedies, energy healing, and homeopathy.

In addition, Americans spent more than \$27 billion on these therapies in 1997, exceeding out-of-pocket spending for all U.S. hospitalizations.

A survey published in 1994 reveals that more than 60 percent of doctors from a wide range of specialties recommended alternative therapies to their patients at least once. In addition, 47 percent of the doctors in this study reported using alternative therapies themselves.²

Indeed, 75 out of 117 U.S. medical schools offered elective courses in CAM or included CAM topics in required courses, according to an article published in 1998.³

Another survey found that people used CAM not only because they were dissatisfied with conventional medicine, but because these health care alternatives mirrored their own values, beliefs, and philosophical orientations toward health and life.⁴

The NCCAM Clearinghouse does not provide medical referrals, medical advice, or recommendations for specific CAM therapies. Talk with your doctor about the potential benefits and risks of complementary and alternative health care practices.

Despite the broad use of alternative therapies, health care professionals and the public need more substantial scientific information to demonstrate convincingly whether CAM practices lead to positive clinical outcomes; improve quality of life; and are effective, safe, and/or beneficial. This is where the NCCAM comes into the picture.

What Is the NCCAM?

In 1998, the Congress established the NCCAM at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to stimulate, develop, and support research on CAM for the benefit of the public. The NCCAM is an advocate for quality science, rigorous and relevant research, and open and objective inquiry into which CAM practices work, which do not, and why. Its overriding mission is to give the American public reliable information about the safety and effectiveness of CAM practices.

The NCCAM is 1 of more than 20 Institutes and Centers (ICs) composing the NIH. The NIH is one of eight health agencies within the Public Health Service of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The NIH is among the world's foremost biomedical research institutions and is the Federal Government's focal point for biomedical research in the United States.

NCCAM's Purpose and Mission

The NCCAM conducts and supports basic and applied (clinical) research and research training on CAM. Basic research generally refers to investigations, such as test-tube studies, that take place under controlled conditions in scientific laboratories. Clinical research refers to medical studies of new treatments in people that take place in health care settings, such as hospitals or medical clinics. Scientific inquiry into CAM is a relatively new area of research.

The NCCAM provides information about CAM to health care providers and the public. The Center also develops other programs to further

the investigation and application of CAM treatments that show promise.

The NCCAM focuses on the following efforts:

- Evaluating the safety and efficacy of widely used natural products, such as herbal remedies and nutritional and food supplements (e.g., mega-doses of vitamins);
- Supporting pharmacological studies to determine the potential interactive effects of CAM products with standard treatment medications; and
- Evaluating CAM practices, such as acupuncture and chiropractic.

The director of the NCCAM is appointed by the Secretary of the DHHS and reports to the director of the NIH. In 1999, Stephen E. Straus, M.D., an internationally recognized expert in clinical research, was named the director of the NCCAM.

Since Fiscal Year (FY) 1993, NCCAM's budget has steadily risen from \$2 million to \$68.7 million in FY 2000. This funding increase reflects the public's growing need for CAM information that is based on rigorous scientific research.

The Center is located on the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland.

NCCAM's Objectives

The NCCAM works toward the following goals, grouped under three main headings:

Research

- Collaborate with other NIH ICs and other Federal agencies to advance CAM scientific study.
- Identify and investigate promising, understudied areas.

- Establish a global network for CAM research.

Research Training

- Implement a comprehensive research training plan.
- Provide research training and clinical fellowships.
- Educate CAM scientists about biomedical research methods.
- Educate conventional researchers about the nature and principles of CAM.

Communications

- Establish effective partnerships with CAM researchers, health professionals, and the public.
- Collaborate on CAM information dissemination with other NIH ICs and other Federal agencies.
- Distribute scientifically based information about CAM research, practices, and findings to health care providers and consumers.

NCCAM's History and Related Legislation

The NCCAM was initiated through a congressional mandate under the FY 1999 Omnibus appropriations bill signed by President Bill Clinton on October 21, 1998. Before that time, the NCCAM was the Office of Alternative Medicine (OAM). The OAM, established in 1992 within the NIH Office of the Director, facilitated and coordinated the evaluation of alternative medical treatment modalities through research projects and other initiatives with NIH's ICs.

At that time, OAM's primary role was to emphasize the rigorous scientific evaluation of CAM treatments, develop a solid infrastructure to coordinate and conduct research at the NIH, and establish a clearinghouse to provide information to the public.

OAM's expansion into a Center gives the NCCAM greater ability to initiate and fund additional research projects and to provide more information to the public at a time when a growing number of people are interested in CAM therapies and systems of practice.

The 1999 Omnibus legislation also established a White House Commission on Complementary and Alternative Medicine Policy. This Commission will study issues regarding research; training and certification of CAM practitioners; insurance coverage; and other alternative medicine issues. The DHHS will make appointments to and oversee the Commission.

NCCAM's Program Advisory Council

The National Institutes of Health Revitalization Act of 1993 provided for the establishment of a Program Advisory Council to advise the OAM director. The Council officially was formed in the summer of 1994, and its first meeting was held in September of that year.

The Council, now called the National Advisory Council on Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NACCAM), meets 3 times a year and currently has 17 members. According to the 1999 Omnibus legislation, at least half of the members are practitioners licensed in one or more of the main subsystems of CAM with which the NCCAM is concerned, and at least three members are consumer representatives. Council members are appointed by the Secretary of the DHHS for overlapping terms up to 4 years.

NCCAM Programs

Underlying NCCAM's programs is the congressional mandate to study and disseminate information about the safety and effectiveness of CAM therapies and facilitate the integration of safe and effective treatments into an interdisciplinary health care delivery system.

To accomplish such a broad mandate, NCCAM programs support rigorous scientific review, tapping the expertise of scientists from other NIH ICs and other Federal agencies. NCCAM's programs incorporate input from the NACCAM.

Below, we have organized the description of NCCAM's programs into the following five functional areas: extramural research, intramural research training, scientific databases, public information clearinghouse, and liaison with CAM stakeholders.

1. Extramural Research (Grants)

The Extramural Research Program helps design, develop, review, fund, and implement specific CAM research projects and training that occur outside the NIH, in addition to coordinating grants with other NIH ICs.

The goals of this program are to increase the number of NCCAM-supported grants, increase co-funding of the CAM-related activities of other NIH ICs, streamline the management of extramural grants and IC cooperative activities, and maintain information on the status and results of NCCAM-supported research.

The program awards National Research Service Award Institutional Training Grants (T32) to eligible institutions to develop or enhance research training opportunities for individuals, selected by the institution, who are training for careers in specified areas of biomedical and behavioral research. The

program supports CAM research-related training of pre-doctoral and post-doctoral students.

A great challenge of the program is to educate potential researchers in CAM to follow methodological procedures that have been long established in the biomedical research communities.

At the same time, conventional researchers interested in CAM need information about the nature, principles, and practices of CAM systems and modalities and their linkage to NCCAM research priorities. In this way, scientific research standards can be applied to CAM research to provide valid and reliable results.

For information about specific products and services of the Extramural Research Program, visit NCCAM's Web site <<http://nccam.nih.gov/nccam/an/nccamorg/extramural/index.html>>.

For information about specific extramural research projects, call the NCCAM Clearinghouse toll-free at 1-888-644-6226.

CAM Research Centers—The NCCAM funds several CAM Research Centers outside the NIH. For up-to-date contact information, specialty areas, and brief descriptions of the Centers, visit NCCAM's Web site <<http://nccam.nih.gov/nccam/fi/research/centers.html>>, or call the NCCAM Clearinghouse toll-free at 1-888-644-6226.

2. Intramural Research Training

The Intramural Research Program supports the work of CAM researchers at scientific laboratories within the NIH. This program provides a foundation for NIH scientists to conduct basic and clinical research in CAM.

The program funds individual post-doctoral fellowships. These fellowships are designed to train a group of investigators who have the skills needed to conduct systematic studies of the safety, efficacy, cost-effectiveness, or mechanisms of action of unconventional methods for treating major diseases and promoting well-being.

3. Scientific Databases

The Scientific Databases Program provides an infrastructure for identifying, organizing, and appraising the scientific literature on CAM practices. The goal is to establish comprehensive, electronic, bibliographic databases of this literature. The literature in these databases is designed to serve as an ongoing source of CAM information for scientists, researchers, practitioners, and the public.

The program also evaluates the scientific literature on CAM practices in conjunction with DHHS's Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), provides research-based information about CAM practices for dissemination to health professionals and the public, and continues development of a classification system specific for CAM practices. Additionally, the program enhances existing indexing and retrieval capabilities of bibliographic databases for information about CAM practices.

Through the use of rigorous techniques to appraise CAM scientific literature, this program is implementing a process with the AHRQ for developing systematic reviews and meta-analyses of the scientific literature. A systematic review is a report on the science in a particular area of health care. In a meta-analysis, a number of research papers on a specific topic are collected and evaluated scientifically.

To date, this program includes the following two bibliographic databases of CAM information evaluated and selected by the NCCAM for dissemination to the public via the Internet:

- **CAM Citation Index**

<http://nccam.nih.gov/nccam/resources/cam-ci>

NCCAM's CAM Citation Index provides bibliographic citations of more than 180,000 journal articles describing CAM research studies and their results. This database includes biomedical research information that also is found in the National Library of Medicine's MEDLINE database. While MEDLINE covers a wide range of biomedical topics, the CAM Citation Index focuses specifically on topics of interest to CAM stakeholders.

- **AM Database of CHID**

<http://chid.nih.gov>

Through its Public Information Clearinghouse, the NCCAM maintains the Complementary and Alternative Medicine (AM) Database of the Combined Health Information Database (CHID). The AM Database contains bibliographic summaries of books, journal articles, research reports, audiovisuals, and other materials about CAM. As a single source of information from the Federal Government about a wide range of health topics, CHID is a convenient reference tool for health professionals, patients, and the public.

4. Public Information Clearinghouse

The NCCAM Clearinghouse, established in 1996, is the public's point of contact and access to information about CAM and NCCAM's programs, conferences, and

research activities. Services include a toll-free information line (1-888-644-6226), publications, referrals to other information resources, and the AM Database of CHID. The Clearinghouse is located in Maryland near the NIH campus.

The Clearinghouse collects and disseminates information to the public, media, and health care professionals to promote awareness and education about CAM research and the NCCAM. The Clearinghouse disseminates CAM information that focuses on the scientific research funded, conducted, or collected by the NCCAM, other NIH ICs, and their grantees. The Clearinghouse does not provide medical referrals, medical advice, or recommendations for specific CAM therapies.

Access to the NCCAM Clearinghouse—

NCCAM Clearinghouse information specialists respond in English and Spanish to inquiries for information by toll-free telephone (1-888-644-6226), TTY/TDY for the hearing impaired (1-888-644-6226), fax (301-495-4957), e-mail (nccamc@altmedinfo.org), and postal mail (NCCAM Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 8218, Silver Spring, MD 20907-8218). They answer calls Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Eastern time.

After regular business hours, callers either may leave their names and telephone numbers or request fact sheets and other information through the Clearinghouse's Fax-On-Demand system, available through the toll-free number (1-888-644-6226).

Disclaimer Regarding Medical Information and Advice—

The NCCAM is not a referral agency for alternative medical treatments or individual practitioners. Therefore, the NCCAM Clearinghouse does not provide medical advice to patients, and it does not provide referrals to alternative health care practitioners.

NCCAM Clearinghouse information specialists are not health care professionals. The information they provide cannot substitute for the medical expertise and advice of a doctor. The NCCAM encourages all patients to talk with their primary health care practitioner about the advantages and risks of CAM treatments.

NCCAM's Customer Service Commitment—

The NCCAM Clearinghouse processes requests for general information within 2 business days upon receipt of the requests.

NCCAM Clearinghouse staff members strive to give you quality service. Constructive feedback is welcomed. Please mail comments in writing to the NCCAM Clearinghouse Project Director at the NCCAM Clearinghouse, P.O. Box 8218, Silver Spring, MD 20907-8218.

For more information about the NCCAM Clearinghouse, call the NCCAM Clearinghouse toll-free at 1-888-644-6226 and ask for a copy of the Clearinghouse's brochure, *Want Information About Alternative Medicine?*

NCCAM Clearinghouse Products—

In addition to maintaining the AM Database of CHID, the NCCAM Clearinghouse produces fact sheets, a newsletter, and other publications that provide information about CAM research supported by the NCCAM and other ICs of the NIH. The information is free of charge. For a list of our publications, call the NCCAM Clearinghouse toll-free at 1-888-644-6226, and ask for a copy of our publications order form.

The Clearinghouse produces NCCAM's newsletter that features CAM updates, NIH research news, and information from the NCCAM. The newsletter is available to the public through the NCCAM Clearinghouse

or on NCCAM's Web site <<http://nccam.nih.gov/nccam/ne/newsletter/index.html>>.

NCCAM's Media Relations—NCCAM's Media Relations area facilitates accurate coverage of relevant stories with the news media, and provides information about the NCCAM and its current activities to mass media audiences.

5. Liaison with CAM Stakeholders

The International and Professional Liaison Program supports and facilitates cooperative efforts in research and education in CAM approaches worldwide and with professional organizations across the United States. In November 1996, the NCCAM, then the OAM, was designated a World Health Organization Collaborating Center in Traditional Medicine. The 4-year designation includes the NCCAM as part of an international network of 19 established institutions, located in national governments or universities worldwide, that focus on traditional medicine and CAM.

Other NCCAM Activities—A major function of the NCCAM is to facilitate the evaluation of various alternative treatment modalities through ICs within the NIH. This cooperation is based on well-established expertise and encourages collaboration on projects of mutual interest. The NCCAM has identified a network of coordinators at the NIH to assist with issues related to researching alternative medical practices and treatments. In addition, the NCCAM facilitates CAM data review and research with other agencies of the Federal Government.

NCCAM's Web Site—The NCCAM maintains a Web site <<http://nccam.nih.gov>> to give you CAM information. Topics on NCCAM's Web site include: the NCCAM; frequently asked questions; Clearinghouse publications; CAM databases; NCCAM research; clinical

trial opportunities; research policies, applications, and guidelines; NCCAM's newsletter; press releases; and minutes of NCCAM-sponsored meetings.

Town Meetings—The NCCAM plans to convene a series of regional town meetings for CAM consumers, researchers, practitioners, and the public. The first town meeting, on March 15, 2000, at Harvard University in Boston, Massachusetts, was sponsored in collaboration with the Center for Alternative Medicine Research, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center.

The town meetings offer an opportunity for input from professionals, patients, advocacy groups, and local residents who have an interest in CAM, the NCCAM, or other ICs of the NIH.

CAM Conferences and Education—The NCCAM collaborates with other ICs of the NIH to sponsor CAM-related conferences and educational programs. Separate topics covered to date include acupuncture, behavioral treatments, chronic pain, health insurance issues, liver disease, and nursing education.

Cancer Advisory Panel for CAM

Research—The Cancer Advisory Panel for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAPCAM) is a 15-member panel created in 1998 that includes patient advocates, researchers, and administrators from conventional biomedical and CAM communities. The CAPCAM facilitates the joint review of data from cancer research projects through the NCCAM and National Cancer Institute, another NIH IC.

CAPCAM's mission is to review and assess clinical data submitted by CAM cancer researchers and to advise the NCCAM on the next research steps.

The CAPCAM held its first meeting on July 8-9, 1999, in Bethesda, Maryland. The agenda enabled panel members to explore the scope of their advisory role and to hear presentations of two Best Case Series. The term “Best Case Series” refers to precise clinical information—collected while patients undergo treatment—that indicates some benefit to the patients being studied.

The second CAPCAM meeting was held on December 13, 1999, in Bethesda, Maryland. Speakers from within the NCCAM and NIH discussed the Best Care program for analyzing data from CAM cancer medicine practitioners. Guest speakers discussed the benefits of psychosocial treatment (e.g., group therapy) to patients with certain types of cancer and the current efforts to study the use of CAM as a complement to standard radiation oncology procedures.

Trans-Agency CAM Coordinating Committee—NCCAM’s Trans-Agency CAM Coordinating Committee is a group of representatives of several other Federal agencies and departments. The Committee is designed to help the NCCAM coordinate scientific input for CAM research and explore research partnerships.

For More Information

Please send requests for information about complementary or alternative medicine to:

NCCAM Clearinghouse
P.O. Box 8218
Silver Spring, MD 20907-8218

1-888-644-6226

(Toll-Free, TTY/TDY, and Fax-On-Demand)

1-301-495-4957 (Fax)

nccamc@altmedinfo.org (E-Mail)

<http://nccam.nih.gov> (NCCAM Web Site)

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